

# First Sunday of Advent



## A Prayer as Advent Begins

*Gather for prayer around your Advent wreath or a lit candle.*

God our caring Father,  
you who gave your beloved Son  
to ransom all people,  
see our human fears  
and love us anyway.  
Guide us through this season  
with quiet, glad anticipation.  
Help us to pay attention  
to the poor and needy,  
and to the lonely among us.  
Give us a spirit of reflection,  
patience with each other,  
and hearts brimming with thanks.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

## Sunday, December 2, 2012 Confidence Transforms Fear

Today's Readings: Jeremiah 33:14–16; Psalm 25:4–5, 8–9, 10, 14 (1b); 1 Thessalonians 3:12–4:2; Luke 21:25–28, 34–36. At first the Gospel seems to set a tone of fear. When we hear of cataclysmic disasters, we want to run and hide. Yet Jesus' advice is just the opposite: "Stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (28).

We still hear rumors of apocalyptic events that stir up fears, and the threats of terrorism and natural disasters are worrisome. But according to Jesus, God does not want us to live in fear. No parent want their child to run away in terror when they enter a room. How, then, could God, the finest parent, invoke fear when he wants our love and trust?

If we choose to live in fear, it's as if we prefer the dingy basement room to the best suite at a five-star resort. As Advent begins, Jesus promises to win our ransom. We who have good reason to be anxious can be confident and secure in Jesus' victory through his suffering.

He rightly warns us to be on guard. He sees clearly that life is full of evil. To really live as he did requires tremendous courage, clear-sightedness, and strength. Christianity isn't all cozy potlucks, inspiring choirs, and lovely liturgies! Jesus never denies harsh reality, but he always offers hope. He knows that we'll often hit bottom, but even there he won't betray us. His love extends into the deepest pit and the worst tragedy.



## This Week at Home

### Monday, December 3

#### Memorial of Saint Francis Xavier

Welcome to a season of reflection, mystery, and blessing! In the sixteenth century when Saint Francis Xavier crossed the world to preach the Gospel, travel was treacherous. Saint Ignatius, his friend and the founder of his order, the Jesuits, asked his companions to make copies of their letters to send on different ships in case of loss. What compelled Francis? Perhaps he found in India or Japan the kind of faith that amazed Jesus in today's Gospel. Jesus was astonished by the centurion, a Roman outside of the Jewish circle, who placed great trust in him. As Advent starts, do we expect the unexpected? Do we stand on tiptoe, looking forward to God's surprises? Today's Readings: Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 122:1-2, 3-4b, 4cd-5, 6-7, 8-9; Matthew 8:5-11.

### Tuesday, December 4

#### The Work of Praise

Jesus sets the tone for Advent in today's Gospel, praising God for revealing to those who are childlike things hidden from the wise and learned. Children move through the world in wonder, fascinated by a cobweb, a pinecone, a drop in a puddle, or a duck. Imitate them: find three ordinary things in your day for which to praise God. Today's Readings: Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17 (see 7); Luke 10:21-24.

### Wednesday, December 5

#### Restoring Health

Two different stories in today's Gospel show Jesus touching different kinds of people in need: the sick and the hungry. In both cases, he restores the beloved child of God to health and wholeness. What illness or hunger in yourself do you want Jesus to cure? Today's Readings: Isaiah 25:6-10a; Psalm 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6 (6cd); Matthew 15:29-37.

### Thursday, December 6

#### Optional Memorial of Saint Nicholas

Saint Nicholas has become a legend because of his kindness to the poor. In today's Gospel, Jesus warns against only calling for help ("Lord, Lord") instead of trying to do the Father's will each day. Listening to and acting on Jesus' words will ground our spiritual home on solid rock. As Advent begins, what words of Jesus will shield you and your family against winds of change, storms of problems, and floods that overwhelm? Today's Readings: Isaiah 26:1-6; Psalm 118:1 and 8-9, 19-21, 25-27a (26a); Matthew 7:21, 24-27.

### Friday, December 7

#### An Ongoing "Yes"

Before curing the blind men, Jesus asks them if they think he can do it. It may be a gamble, but they stoutly declare "yes." Saint Ambrose, whose memorial we celebrate today, was raised a Christian, educated well in Rome, and became a governor in Milan. In the midst of controversies, people turned to Ambrose for his tact and wisdom. Though he was reluctant to assume the office of bishop, he said "yes." For 23 active years, he lived out that "yes," studied intensely, spoke profoundly, and with the help of Saint Monica, converted Saint Augustine. Today's Readings: Isaiah 29:17-24; Psalm 27:1, 4, 13-14 (1a); Matthew 9:27-31.

### Saturday, December 8

#### Immaculate Conception of Mary

Mary was "redeemed from the moment of her conception" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 491). This doesn't mean she sailed through life without the normal human experiences of doubt, fear, or sorrow. It means she's a good person to talk with when we're experiencing those troubling emotions. Take ten minutes today to imagine or write a conversation with Mary. What would you say to her? How might she respond? Today's Readings: Genesis 3:9-15, 20; Psalm 98:1, 2-3ab, 3cd-4 (1); Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12; Luke 1:26-38.



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*Keeping the Seasons*

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